

Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire

VOLUNTEERING POLICY

1. General Policy Statement

Volunteers are acknowledged as important partners and stakeholders within Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire who work along side staff to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector across South Bedfordshire. We recognise the value volunteers bring to society, the diversity of local communities and the important contribution made by volunteers to the life of those who live, work and pursue leisure activities within South Bedfordshire.

Voluntary and Community Action values the work of volunteers and recognises the important role they play in enabling the organisation to function and deliver its services. This may include work with colleagues to provide training, information, development support, funding advice and volunteering services to voluntary organisations, community groups and others interested in developing and promoting local voluntary and community action.

2. Purpose

This policy applies to volunteers working within Voluntary and Community Action South Bedfordshire. It does not cover volunteers that use our services or are placed with other organisations; nor does it include members of the Trustee Board who are specifically covered in the Governance Policy.

The purpose of this policy is to enable volunteers to be recruited, supported and managed in a way that reflects the values of the organisation. Voluntary and Community Action seeks to ensure that the relationship the organisation has with its volunteers is of a non-contractual nature and that no legal contract or relationship of employment is created.

3. Principles

This policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- a recognition that volunteering is something an individual chooses to do and that every individual has the right to volunteer without experiencing coercion or discrimination;
- a commitment to ensuring equality of access to volunteering opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers in all our practices;
- a recognition that volunteers contribute their time, skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to the organisation and that, by doing so, they can often enhance or complement those that currently exist within the organisation;
- a commitment to ensuring that volunteers are valued and integrated within the organisational structure and that processes are in place for them to contribute to the work of the organisation;
- a recognition that volunteers need satisfying work that is personally fulfilling and opportunities for personal development and a commitment to helping volunteers meet these needs and to providing appropriate support and training for them to do their work effectively;

- a commitment that Voluntary and Community Action will not involve volunteers as a means of replacing paid staff;
- a commitment that all Voluntary and Community Action staff will work positively with volunteers.

4. Recruitment and Selection

Voluntary and Community Action aims to have a fair, effective and open system in recruiting and selecting volunteers. It is committed to ensuring that no volunteer is less favourably treated or denied opportunities because of their background, including; colour, 'race', gender, age, sexuality, disability, or social or economic background. For further information see the organisation's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy.

Opportunities will be advertised in our *Directory of Volunteering Opportunities*, through the national volunteering opportunities website (www.do-it.org.uk), our website and other promotional material.

Volunteer role descriptions and person specifications will be provided and may be amended during the selection process to enable both the needs of the organisation and the individual volunteer to be met. Potential volunteers will attend an informal interview with the Volunteering Officer or Volunteering Adviser and any other member of staff to whom the volunteer may be responsible, complete an application form and provide a personal reference. During the interview time will be given to exploring a volunteer's motivations and interests for working with the organisation. All personal details will be kept confidential and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The aim of this process is to allow both parties to assess whether the volunteer opportunities available match the potential volunteer's skills, knowledge, experience and needs. If there are no suitable volunteering opportunities within the organisation, individuals will be helped to identify suitable alternatives with other organisations.

5. Criminal Convictions

If the role requires the post holder to work with children, young people or adults who are considered vulnerable because of their age, illness or disability they will be asked to make an application for a criminal records check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and to provide Voluntary and Community Action with the Disclosure Certificate, so that it can make a certified copy for its records and assess the volunteer's suitability for positions of trust.

A Disclosure is only requested if it is both proportionate and relevant to the position concerned. For those opportunities where a Disclosure is required, the person specification will contain a statement that a Disclosure will be requested in the event of the individual being offered the position. Applicants will be made aware of the existence of the DBS Code of Practice and a copy made available on request.

Where a Disclosure is to form part of the recruitment process, a potential volunteer will be encouraged to provide details of their criminal record at an early stage in the application process. Potential volunteers will be asked to provide this information under separate, confidential cover, to a designated person within the organisation and we guarantee that this information will only be seen by those who need to see it as part of the recruitment process.

If the person selected starts work before a DBS Disclosure Certificate is received by Voluntary and Community Action, they will not be able to work unsupervised with children, young people or adults who are considered vulnerable because of their age, illness or disability until a satisfactory Disclosure is received.

Unless the nature of the position allows Voluntary and Community Action to ask questions about an applicant's entire criminal record, we only ask about *unspent* convictions as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Voluntary and Community Action will ensure that a discussion takes place, at the interview, of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position could lead to withdrawal of an offer to volunteer with the organisation. Voluntary and Community Action also undertakes to discuss any matter revealed in a Disclosure with the person seeking the position before withdrawing a conditional offer of voluntary work.

Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar anyone from volunteering with the organisation. This will depend on the nature of the role and the circumstances and background of the offences.

6. Volunteers Requiring Additional Support

Voluntary and Community Action may decide to take on volunteers who may be regarded as vulnerable and/or who have additional support needs or who have or are recovering from mental ill health. Consideration will be given to:

- appropriate supervision levels (which may be higher than usual) and the availability of staff or other volunteers to provide this;
- the suitability of the tasks and the volunteering opportunities available within the organisation;
- the availability of a suitable working environment, office facilities and/or premises;
- the most appropriate time when volunteering tasks can be undertaken;
- any procedures, treatment or other factors affecting the well-being of the individual and the ability of the organisation to provide these;
- the needs of the organisations and the volunteer.

7. Induction, Support and Training

New volunteers will be made welcome and given a Volunteer Information Pack covering:

- brief description of the organisation and its values
- equal opportunities and diversity
- health and safety
- code of conduct
- confidentiality
- disagreements and problems
- insurance
- expenses
- support and training

Information contained in the pack will be discussed with the volunteer during the induction. A volunteer induction checklist will also be used.

We recognise that volunteers should be given regular supervision to discuss problems or other issues and to be given thanks and feedback. All volunteers will have a named supervisor who will be their main source of support and supervision during their voluntary work with Voluntary and Community Action.

Volunteers will have access to training and development opportunities to enable them to fulfil their role within the organisation and its work within the voluntary and community sector. They may choose to attend any in-house training workshop or course that they feel is relevant to their voluntary work, subject to the approval of their supervisor and the availability of places. Volunteers may also apply to the Director for financial support to attend external courses, where these can be shown to have a clear relevance to the role they are undertaking within the organisation.

Where, during the volunteer recruitment stage, it is felt that a trial period would be of benefit to the volunteer and/or the organisation, this will be determined prior to or on commencement. A review of the role and the tasks undertaken, the extent to which these have met or can meet the needs of the volunteer and the organisation and consideration of the future contribution the volunteer can make will be undertaken.

Similar reviews will also be undertaken with volunteers at least every two years, or at any time if requested by either the volunteer or the organisation, after which the volunteer and the organisation will jointly decide on the future contribution the volunteer can make to the organisation. This may result in the volunteer continuing in their existing role, changing their role within the organisation or being helped to find a new role within another organisation. Where the volunteer remains with the organisation, the opportunity to identify and access further support, training and involvement will also be considered.

8. Confidentiality

Volunteers may, during the course of their work, obtain knowledge of a confidential nature about the work of the organisation, or about volunteers, staff, trustees, members, voluntary organisations, community groups and other clients who have contact with the organisation. There is an absolute obligation, both during and after their work with Voluntary and Community Action, to maintain confidentiality in all these matters and not to pass on information to third parties unless required to do so by law. Volunteers will be required to sign and adhere to the organisation's Confidentiality Statement.

9. Code of Conduct

Voluntary and Community Action is committed to having a working atmosphere that is conducive to the nature of the work it undertakes; the values of the organisation; its public image and reputation; and the welfare and personal security of employees, volunteers and trustees. Volunteers will be expected to abide by our written code of conduct which sets out what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for employees, volunteers and trustees while carrying out the work of the organisation. In essence, this means volunteers must:

- follow the letter and spirit of the organisation's policies and procedures;
- act in a manner which displays respect for all people and reflects the values of the organisation

Should a volunteer behave inappropriately the matter will be dealt with through the disagreements and problems procedure specifically set out for volunteers.

10. Dealing with Disagreements and Problems

Voluntary and Community Action will aim to deal with any difficulties with a volunteer or their work in a fair, open and effective way. Equally, volunteers will be encouraged to address problems about any aspect of their work or how it is managed. The volunteer's supervisor will deal with any minor problems during regular support sessions. In the event of a more serious disagreement or problem a more formal procedure will take place.

What a volunteer should do if they have a problem

If a volunteer has a problem with the way they have been treated by another volunteer, member of staff, trustee or client they should follow the steps below.

- Discuss the problem with their supervisor to see if the matter can be resolved quickly.
- If the matter is not resolved, or involves a complaint against the supervisor, the volunteer has the option to raise the problem in person, by telephone, or in writing with the Director.
- If the volunteer is not happy with the outcome they have the right to put their case to a specially convened appeal panel. The panel will investigate the facts and decide on an appropriate response. They will inform the volunteer of what action they will take within 14 days of being told about the problem. The decision of the appeal panel will be final.
- The volunteer may be accompanied by a friend, another volunteer or a member of staff if they wish during any part of this procedure.

How the organisation will respond to a volunteer who is causing a problem

In the unlikely situation that a volunteer causes a problem through not following the guidelines of the organisation or by behaving inappropriately (see the Code of Conduct on what is unacceptable behaviour), the organisation will follow the steps below.

- The supervisor will talk discreetly to the volunteer (and others if necessary) to establish the facts. If the problem is minor then the supervisor will aim to resolve the matter quickly and as they feel is appropriate.
- In the event of a serious complaint or inappropriate behaviour, such as outlined in the Code of Conduct, the supervisor will consult with the Director and decide on the appropriate action to take, which might include:
 - further discussion with the volunteer
 - closer supervision
 - further training
 - a change in role
 - suspension or cessation of volunteering
 - contacting an outside agency such as social services or the police (in the event of serious misconduct).

The organisation reserves the right to ask a volunteer to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the police.

- The volunteer will have the right to appeal to a specially convened appeal panel and may be accompanied by a friend, another volunteer or a member of staff. The panel will investigate the facts and decide on an appropriate response. They will inform the volunteer of what action they will take within 14 days of being told about the problem. The decision of the appeal panel will be final.

11. Health and Safety

Voluntary and Community Action has a duty of care to all its volunteers and will ensure that they are made aware of our Health and Safety Policy and of their duty to comply with guidelines for their own, and others' personal safety. The organisation has a non-smoking policy at its premises. Volunteers will be provided with guidelines on personal safety for volunteers. For further information see the organisation's Health and Safety Policy.

A risk assessment for each volunteer role will be undertaken by the Volunteering Officer, together with the relevant team leader, in consultation with the Health and Safety Officer. In the case of a volunteer requiring additional support, the risk assessment will need to take account of their capabilities. Volunteers will be provided with a copy of the risk assessment undertaken for their role.

12. Insurance

Volunteers with Voluntary and Community Action are fully protected by the organisation's personal accident and public liability insurance. Where a volunteer acts in an advisory role to clients, they will be included in the organisation's professional indemnity insurance. Volunteers using their cars to undertake the work of the organisation may need to inform their insurance company that they are using their car for voluntary work.

13. Expenses

Voluntary and Community Action recognises that volunteering should be accessible to all regardless of income and that volunteers should never be out of pocket for doing their voluntary work. Volunteers are entitled to reimbursement of all reasonable expenses and will be encouraged to claim expenses for:

- travel to and from the organisation (i.e. the cost of public transport fares or an agreed mileage rate);
- a meal and/or light refreshments (should they be working away from the organisation's premises for a period of four hours or more when it would be reasonable to expect a meal to be taken);
- any other reasonable out-of-pocket expenses that are agreed with the Director.

The organisation may be able to contribute to child or dependant care costs to cover the time given to the organisation. Requests will be considered by the Director, but will be subject to the availability of funding.

Volunteers working within Voluntary and Community Action may claim their travel expenses to and from the office and in the course of their volunteering through petty cash on the day they attend, using an Expense Claim Form. Payment may be made by cheque if preferred. For further information see the organisation's Expenses Policy.

14. Consultation and Engagement

Volunteers will be included in relevant internal communications and in the consultation procedures/methods adopted when developing or revising policies that affect the organisation's volunteers.

Volunteers may also be invited to join working groups, task and finish groups or other activities where it is felt they could contribute to the work of the organisation. They may also be included in away days, social events and other team-building activities; with attendance being at their discretion.

The Trustee Board will identify a trustee 'champion' for volunteering.

15. Leaving the Organisation

Voluntary and Community Action recognises that volunteers give their time freely and that their circumstances and availability may alter, resulting in them leaving the organisation. Volunteers have the right to leave at any time; however, to assist with ensuring continuity of service, we would welcome as much notice as possible. The organisation would also welcome informal feedback on the volunteer's experience of working with the organisation.

16. References

Voluntary and Community Action is happy to provide volunteers with references to enable them to undertake other volunteering opportunities or paid employment. This may be during or after their time with the organisation.

17. Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Director. Significant changes will require the approval of the Trustee Board. The policy will also be reviewed every three years as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.